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ABSTRACT

In 1998, the proportion of full-time faculty at U.S. community colleges was reported to be 36%, versus 64% part time. Adjunct faculty are attractive to community colleges primarily because they provide low-cost labor. The conditions under which many community college adjunct faculty work can contribute to their marginalization as a kind of academic underclass. Cohen and Brawer report that colleges tend to invest few resources in hiring part-time faculty because they view these instructors as transient. This article suggests that the best reasons for hiring adjunct faculty are as follows: when full-time professors are on leave, when no full-time professors with a particular expertise are available, and when enrollment exceeds projections. The author argues that adjunct faculty are well-qualified professionals who should be made full partners in the quest for academic excellence. A comprehensive definition of expectations for part-time instructors could serve to help improve treatment of adjuncts and benefit college operations. Suggestions for adjunct faculty performance improvement include orientation and professional development, performance evaluation, and fair employment practices, including equitable pay. The paper argues for continued research into best practices in the effective use of part-time faculty. (Contains 20 references.) (Author/NB)

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The Accidental Faculty: Adjunct Instructors in Community Colleges

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Abstract

Part-time, or adjunct, faculty have been a major presence in community colleges from their beginning. Today, at least half of all community college instructors in the United States work part-time. Part-time instructors fill a variety of needs in community colleges, adding real-world experience, specialized subject knowledge, and the ability to respond flexibly to fluctuating enrollment demands. Yet these key players are often treated as contingent, expendable laborers—an academic underclass without access to their institutions' resources and support. This can result in uneven educational experiences for their students. This paper explores ways in which part-time faculty can be fully integrated into the organizational culture of community colleges. Such integration is necessary for the ethical treatment of these important members of the instructional community, and for the overall success and viability of the colleges.

The Accidental Faculty: Adjunct Instructors in Community Colleges

They are careerists who possess valuable real-world experience. They are respected colleagues whose specialized subject knowledge adds to the variety of a college's course offerings. Adjunct instructors help colleges to respond flexibly to emerging enrollment demands. Teaching at a community college is, for many of them, a resume-building form of civic involvement—or a rewarding way to spend free time in retirement.

They are lurkers on the outskirts of academe. They are casual laborers who take up the slack when full-time faculty members are unavailable to teach additional sections of a course. By the same token, adjunct instructors can be shoved aside at the last minute by full-time faculty who want to exercise contractual rights to overloads. Teaching at a community college may be one of several assignments that part-time faculty cobble together into a substandard livelihood.

Such divergent viewpoints are among the many that emerge from a review of the literature by, for, and about adjuncts--or part-time instructors--in community colleges. What also appears is a sense that these faculty members are critical to the financial and programmatic viability of their institutions. Yet, in many cases, adjuncts do not receive commensurate support and respect from their full-time colleagues, nor from administrators. This paper explores ways in which adjuncts can be more fully integrated into their institutions. Assimilation can result in more-equitable treatment of these professionals, improved quality of education for their students, and overall benefits to the colleges. The terms "adjuncts", "adjunct instructors", and "part-time faculty" are used interchangeably.

The Rise of Adjuncts in Community Colleges: A Brief History

Adjuncts have always comprised a large proportion of community college faculty. In 1931, Eells proposed that secondary school instructors teaching in the colleges could provide

specialized scientific knowledge and closer coordination with the secondary school curriculum, while university professors could bring the curricula of the colleges in line with that of the universities. All part-time faculty members could help the colleges meet emerging instructional needs and increase enrollment (Roueche, J.E; Roueche, S.D.; & Milliron, 1998, p.3).

In the early days, the colleges did see large proportions of part-time instructors, many of them high school teachers. Gradually, as these institutions became more established, full-time faculty began outnumbering part-timers. By the late 1960s, almost two-thirds of the community college faculty workforce was full-time. Then the pendulum started swinging the other way until, by 1986, the part-time ranks had swelled again to 60% of community college faculty. By 1992, the proportion of part-time instructors had dipped again, to 53%. In 1998, the ratio of full-time faculty was reported to be 36%, versus 64% part-time (Cohen & Brawer, 1996, p. 85; Schneider as cited in Parsons, 1998, p. 3).

Part-time and full-time faculty ratios have waxed and waned because of changes in curriculum, accreditation requirements, and work force demands, among other factors. But a more recent, and crucial, development would seem to be the aging of the full-time faculty in the colleges. Forty percent of the full-time faculty was expected to retire by the year 2000. Judging from the rates of employment of part-time instructors, there is no doubt that adjunct instructors are--and will continue to be--indispensable to community colleges (Cohen & Brawer, 1996, p. 85; Gabert, as cited in Freeland, 1998, p.1; Banachowski, 1997).

Current Conditions: Adjuncts as Contingent Workers

The current literature on adjunct faculty in the community colleges has much to say about their working conditions and the reasons why they are so attractive to colleges.

Budget Savings. The primary reason why adjuncts are a perennial fixture in community colleges is economic: part-time instructors provide "low-cost labor" and thus are to the colleges "as migrant workers are to farms"(Cohen & Brawer, 1996, p. 85). Colleges pay adjuncts an average of one-third of the salary of full-time faculty, and generally do not provide them fringe benefits or long-range contracts (Kekke, as cited in McArthur, 1999; Twigg, as cited in Banachowski, 1997).

Hidden Costs. Many critics charge that such practices constitute inequitable and unethical treatment of part-time faculty. Others warn that the savings which seem to accrue from hiring adjuncts may be more than offset by substandard work from these instructors. Teachers who are at best loosely affiliated with an institution are unlikely to give students instruction of a quality comparable to full-time faculty (Academic Senate for California Community Colleges; Banachowski; as cited in McArthur, 1999). One college cited student complaints at off-campus sites, where courses were taught by adjuncts, among the reasons for initiating a peer-mentoring project that paired experienced full-time professors with new part-time instructors (Hoyt, 1990).

Working Conditions. Yet quality instruction may be correlated with the degree of investment that an institution makes in its part-time faculty, including physical working conditions.

Most institutions do not require part-time faculty to meet individually with students or to have scheduled office hours, therefore most part-time instructors lack on-campus office space. Thus, students can have widely disparate educational experiences, depending on whether their instructor is part-time or full-time. And those part-time instructors who still want to meet with their students must often do so in hallways (Jacobs, 1998, p. 14; Lupo, as cited in Welsh-Huggins, 2001).

Discussions of these issues in the scholarly and non-scholarly academic press can come close to "blaming the victim" for problems that the colleges have brought upon themselves through their treatment of adjuncts. Full-time faculty who know of the generally substandard working conditions and compensation of adjuncts may doubt their part-time colleagues' degree of commitment to students (Hall, as cited in Welsh-Huggins, 2001; Gappa & Leslie, 1993, p.107).

Part-time faculty themselves experience ambivalence, conflict and frustration about the circumstances under which they are forced to deliver instruction (Jacobs, 1998, p.14). Yet, according to the American Council on Education, adjuncts are "individuals who want to do this, who enter into these contractual arrangements with their eyes wide open" (Steinbach, as cited in Welsh-Huggins, 2001). Fulton (2000), a college administrator, makes a similar assertion when he writes that, while the current adjunct situation is "unethical and unhealthy," the colleges and the part-timers share the blame for "pretending either that one can live on a collection of part-timer's stipends, or that no one is really trying to do so." He calls on both parties to admit that "part-time positions are not now, nor were they ever, meant to be pieces of full-time positions" (p. 4).

Staffing and Scheduling. It is probably fair to say that filling in staffing gaps with adjuncts is standard practice in community colleges. This may be another instance of quality sacrificed for budget savings, however, because program continuity suffers when many different instructors share a full course load, and even smaller portions of an entire curriculum (Banachowski, as cited in McArthur, 1999). Still, departments do need replacements from time to time, i.e. when full-time professors are on leave, when no full-time professors with a particular expertise are available and, most importantly, when enrollment exceeds projections. This last circumstance can occur beyond the college's control. External factors, such as the economy, the

availability of financial aid, and changes in the job market affecting program popularity and student demand for courses, all contribute to enrollment fluctuations (Jacobs, 1998, p.12).

Mutual Benefits. Colleges can respond flexibly to changing enrollment demands largely because of the temporary nature of adjunct contracts (Lankard; McGuire; as cited in Banachowski, 1997). Adjuncts also contribute "depth, breadth and relevance" to the curriculum, thus enabling colleges to provide courses that might otherwise be unavailable (McGuire, as cited in McArthur, 1999). And, adjuncts who work in their fields inject a "real world" perspective into the colleges' professional preparation programs (Cline; Phelan; as cited in Banachowski, 1997).

Part-time instructors can also benefit from their college employment in various ways, depending on their reasons for teaching. Those employed outside of the teaching profession find that their community college experience benefits their careers, while those who aspire to teaching full-time see part-time work as a step towards their goal (Reed; Silvers; as cited in Banachowski, 1997). And the arrangement also works for those free-lance teachers who work when and where the jobs are available (Cohen & Brawer, 1996, p. 87).

Image vs. Reality. Still, the conditions under which many adjuncts are employed may contribute to their marginalization as a kind of academic underclass. Kurzet asserts that it is not unusual to find college departments where the full-time professors do not know all the names of their part-time colleagues (1997). Gappa & Leslie (1993) encountered full-time faculty who view adjuncts as "laboring drones who supposedly detract from the quality of education." In reality, however, part-time instructors tend to be "exceptionally well qualified for their assignments" (pp. 17,18). Therefore, adjuncts should be made full partners in the quest for academic excellence, a cause which can only be furthered when all the best instructors are working as a team (p. 285).

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Recommendations for Integrating Part-Time Faculty

Several authors recommend ways to create such a team environment, starting with hiring practices.

Selection. Cohen & Brawer (1996) report that colleges tend to invest few resources in hiring part-time instructors because they view these faculty as transients anyway (p. 88). But Roueche, J.E.; Roueche, S.D. & Milliron (1995) recommend that part-time instructors be recruited, selected and hired with "clear purpose and direction," and under procedures and scrutiny comparable to those used in hiring full-time professors (p.155). Kurzet describes a process at her college that involves thoroughly interviewing the adjunct to assess teaching skills, and follow-up assessments through classroom observations made by full-time faculty during the adjunct's first term of employment. A blank copy of the form which the full-time professor uses to record these observations is given to the adjunct upon hire, so that this individual has a clear idea from the start of departmental expectations (1997).

Defining Expectations. Indeed, a comprehensive definition of expectations could help to improve the treatment of adjuncts while benefiting college operations. Instead of viewing adjuncts merely as convenient stopgaps in a departmental schedule, colleges could define what can be realistically accomplished with part-time faculty, and what is impossible to do without them.

> It is important to know how many part-time faculty are employed, what roles they are asked to play, how well they play these roles, and whether or not the roles are appropriate. Answers to these questions will help colleges assess whether the numbers and assignments of part-timers are justified and whether the additional students institutions are able to enroll as a result of increased use of part-timers put too serious a

strain on the institution's infrastructure (Gappa & Leslie, as cited in Roueche, J.E.; Roueche, S.D.; & Milliron, 1995, pp.154-155).

Fulton goes a step further, calling for faculty and administrators to stop fighting each other and instead to join forces in pressing for a realistic number of faculty positions relative to the number of sections required to meet enrollment demands (2000).

Managing Enrollment. When students enroll can be as important as how many are enrolled. An administrator at Hillsborough Community College (HCC), Tampa, Florida, blames permissive policies that allow students to enroll well into a term as contributing to a cavalier view of adjuncts. Jack Evans has worked as an adjunct at HCC and is now Dean of the Associate in Science program at the Ybor City Campus. He continues to teach one section of a course as an adjunct instructor, so as to "stay in touch with the students" and maintain a "realistic view" of the challenges facing instructors.

Evans would like to see HCC commit to a minimum annual guaranteed course schedule. Such a scenario would achieve several objectives:

- Students would be encouraged to enroll early
- Administrators would be able to schedule full-time faculty, based on their known preferences, for the classes and sections they want to teach. The remaining classes and sections could be identified for adjuncts. This would not preclude the full-time faculty from exercising their contractual right to teach overloads. However, it would minimize the incidence of last minute "bumping" of adjuncts from pre-agreed sections to accommodate full-time faculty preferences.
- Adjuncts and the institution would gain greater good will and respect for each other. (Jack Evans, personal communication, February 25, 2002).

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Orientation and Professional Development. Other recommendations for integrating part-time faculty go beyond the initial hiring and scheduling. Kurzet suggests that requiring, and paying, adjuncts to participate in special projects supports their professional development, while sending the message that they are expected to be professionally active outside the classroom (1997). J.E. Roueche, S.D. Roueche, and Milliron recommend that all part-time instructors undergo mandatory and substantial orientation. This should not be a unique event, but rather part of a continuing series to educate instructors about the college and its expectations of faculty, students and services. Part-time instructors should also be included in regular faculty development activities, conveniently scheduled for those with nontraditional teaching schedules. Attending such events gives adjuncts opportunities to network with and be mentored by full-time colleagues, and to receive continuing education in their disciplines and in teaching methods. Colleges that implement such practices report improved relations between full- and part-time faculty, and better student evaluations (1995, p.155). As a result of one mentoring project at a college which paired new adjuncts with experienced full-time faculty, the part-time instructors demonstrated greater use of course materials and teaching technologies, improved course syllabi, and better understanding of college policy (Hoyt, 1990, p. 9).

Evans would like to see an adjunct orientation program established at HCC. Practical advice on teaching, from classroom management to syllabus-preparation, would be a major feature of orientation workshops for adjuncts. Workshops would be tailored to the needs of adjuncts at all levels of experience, i.e. a more-experienced instructor may not need basic training in how to prepare a syllabus, but might benefit from another topic. Orientations would be scheduled several times per year, featuring different topics each time. Although he would make attendance mandatory for adjuncts, Evans would schedule the sessions conveniently for

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them, and pay attendees a stipend as a sign that the college respects the value of their time. Sessions would be taught by full-time faculty as well as experienced part-time faculty, and both would be paid a daily rate for participating. The full-time faculty would additionally earn professional development credit for conducting workshops (Jack Evans, personal communication, February 25, 2002).

Such a model would appear to address a compensation issue that, according to Jan Ignash, Associate Professor, University of South Florida College of Education, has been a sticking point in discussions of additional requirements for adjuncts (Jan Ignash, personal communication, March 19, 2002). Another compensation option might be that of granting a certain amount of course-release time to full-time faculty in exchange for their mentorship of new part-time faculty (Hoyt, 1990).

Such recommendations emphasize the concept of teaching as the primary discipline in the community college. Evans draws a distinction between being a subject expert and being a good teacher, particularly in the community college environment. As a new adjunct at HCC in 1989, fresh from a teaching career in the Marine Corps, he had received no orientation to teaching in the community college. He soon found that it was not enough to know his field--he also needed to impose considerably more structure and discipline on his new students than he had been obliged to do in the military classroom. He was also unprepared for the varied demographics of the student population in the community college (Jack Evans, personal communication, February 25, 2002).

Evidence supporting the need for adjunct professional development can be gathered from studies conducted by Cohen & Brawer (as cited in Cohen & Brawer, 1996). They report that adjuncts are less likely to be members of professional associations, tend to read fewer scholarly

and professional journals, and are "less concerned with the broader aspects of curriculum and instruction and of the disciplines they represent" (p. 87). [1]

Performance Evaluations. Other recommendations for integrating part-time faculty call for a structured, serious performance evaluation process, consistent with that in place for full-time faculty. Evaluations should be tied to professional development, i.e. they should not be done solely to determine whether to terminate a contract, but also to provide opportunities for the instructors to improve (Roueche, J.E.; Roueche, S.D. & Milliron, 1995, p. 157). Adjuncts should be included in all the reward programs of the college, and be considered for professional development funding (Parsons, 1998, p. 6).

Compensation. The most immediate material recognition of work performed is in the faculty member's paycheck. J.E. Roueche, S.D. Roueche and Milliron (1995) cite evidence from their field study and the literature of widespread inequities in the pay of full- and part-time faculty (p.156). Gappa & Leslie (1993) urge institutions to create salary policies for adjunct instructors that are in keeping with collegewide compensation practices—and which do not treat part-timers as "a transient and expendable work force" (p. 256).

Motivation. In short, administrators are urged to "be fair" in all employment practices relating to part-time instructors. Adjuncts, just as full-time faculty, should be employed under conditions that motivate them to perform well. Colleges should invest in their part-time faculty's growth and development, just as they do with full-time faculty (Gappa & Leslie, 1993, p. 283). Maricopa Community College visibly demonstrated its investment by devoting an entire issue of its instructional development center's online journal to adjunct faculty concerns. This was in keeping with the center's stated goal of expanding its support of adjunct faculty professional development (Maricopa Community Colleges, 2000).

As Gappa and Leslie (1993) assert, the future of the colleges lies largely in their faculty, and part-time instructors comprise a significant portion of this workforce (p. 284). It is in the institutions' own best interests, as well as of their part-time instructors, to implement fair and supportive employment practices (p. 283).

Discussion

The issue of integrating part-time faculty is a matter of ethics. It is a matter of good management of the college's resources. It is a matter of consistent, quality education for students. It is even, according to Parsons, indispensable to achieving institutional excellence (1998).

Students are the ultimate beneficiaries when institutions make their part-time instructors full members of the team. Students receive more consistently high-quality education when part-time instructors are given incentives and resources, including office-space, on-campus email, and phones (Jacobs, 1998, p.17). Adjuncts who are involved in curriculum and textbook decisions contribute to the quality of instructional programs (Suarez, T.E.; Singleton, M.; as cited in Parsons, 1998, p. 6).

Recommended methods of integration require varying levels of commitment on the part of the colleges, but these ideas do not exist merely in the realm of fantasy. Institutions are implementing such initiatives daily, and are documenting positive results. They are sharing their best practices in the literature, and in conferences.[2,3] As Kurzet reports, it is possible to find college departments where the full-time and adjunct faculties consider themselves one team (1997).

Not all recommendations are suitable for every institution. A hallmark of community colleges is their ability to respond nimbly to emerging needs—an ability enabled to a great extent

by the hiring of adjuncts. There is no doubt that many colleges are facing budgetary challenges, which must be considered in setting hiring and other practices. But colleges should also consider the adverse and costly effects on their institutional effectiveness (and possibly on their public image) of keeping such a sizable portion of their instructional personnel—who possess valuable experience and knowledge—excluded from the mainstream.

The first step is an attitudinal shift, from viewing these instructors as expedient lackeys who can be used and abused without consequences, to considering them valued members of the faculty. As Thomas writes, "part-time faculty perform a valuable service....they serve to put the 'community' in community colleges" (2002). Building upon this concept, it is possible for colleges to customize feasible integration techniques from the many that appear in the literature. It will require some commitment of time and resources up front, but colleges may even find that instituting such practices will also benefit other aspects of their operations. For example, besides promoting a planned approach to the hiring of adjuncts, managing enrollment might prevent such problems as incorrect room assignments and unpredicted expenses (Jan Ignash, personal communication, March 19, 2002). Also, as many full-time faculty approach retirement, part-time faculty who have received professional development can be an excellent source of future tenure-track recruits (Miller, 1997).

While considerable research does exist on best practices in the effective use of part-time faculty, a continuing examination of institutions that are implementing such practices, and measurable results of these activities, would be a worthy subject for future research.

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Footnotes

[1]However, a number of professional-development resources geared specifically to adjunct and part-time faculty are available in print and through the Internet. One such resource is written by authors who have served as adjunct and full-time instructors as well as administrators in a variety of settings, and who are "concerned about the underpreparation of adjunct professors" (Lyons, Kysilka & Pawlas, 1999, xiv). Major emphasis is placed on practical "classroom survival skills" and guidance on "achieving a distinctive teaching style" (xiii). Interestingly, one chapter focuses on a "self-directed orientation program," recognizing that the orientation offered by most institutions is "woefully insufficient to address the wide range of challenges that might come (the adjunct's) way"(p. 21). A similar guidance manual for adjuncts provides instructions and tools for time-management, lesson-planning, teaching techniques and student evaluation (Oches & Nkomo, 2000, 13-14). Such books are listed in an advocacy, support, and community-building web site for adjunct instructors ("Professional Resources", n.d., retrieved March 3, 2002, from Adjunct Advocate magazine web site, http://www.adjunctnation.com).

[2] The American Association of Community Colleges 82nd annual convention includes a forum on "considering the adjunct." ("Forum 5: considering the adjunct", n.d., retrieved March 26, 2002, from the American Association of Community Colleges web site, http://199.75.76.22/2002convention/f3.asp)

3The League for Innovation in the Community College's interactive searchable database provides the ability to search for information on past conferences. A search for the terms "part-time faculty" and "adjunct" in the title and description field yields summaries of presentations best practices in utilizing adjuncts ("Innovation at your fingertips: an interactive searchable

database", n.d., retrieved March 26, 2002, from the League for Innovation in the Community College web site, http://www.league.org/leaguetlc/search/search.asp.)

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